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S E L F-M U R D E R.

By ZACHARY PEARCE, D. D.

Now Lord Bishop of ROCHESTER.

THE THIRD EDITION.



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MDCCLXXIII.





JOB II. 10.

SHALL WE RECEIVE GOOD AT THE HAND OF
GOD, AND SHALL WE NOT RECEIVE EVIL?

THESE are the Words of JOB, when he was become one of the most miserable of Mankind: he had lost all his Cattle and his Servants, in which his Wealth consisted; and all his Children, on whom his Affections were strongly placed: and the Loss was the greater, because it was so sudden, and because all his Calamities came upon him so quick one after another, that he had scarcely any time between each to fortify his Mind, by reasoning upon what had past, or preparing himself for what might come. Nor was this all; for we are told soon afterwards, that he was *smitten with sore boils, from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head*; and that, in this deplorable State, *he sat down among the ashes*, as the Eastern Custom was upon such Occasions, *ver. 8.* Then it was, when his Mind was oppress'd

with Grief, and his Body was full of Pain, that he expressed his Sentiments in the Question of the Text, *Shall we receive Good at the hand of GOD, and shall we not receive Evil?*

You see that, amidst all his Losses, he had not lost his Sense of Duty to GOD : he knew how to argue aright upon the Subject of Calamities, even when he was surrounded by them. He considered all his Distresses as happening by the divine Appointment or Permission; and therefore he was so far from *charging God foolishly*, that he even pleaded for the Necessity of Submission to Him under all the Evils of Life.

There might be Wisdom, nay, there might be Goodness, in GOD's suffering these Calamities to beset him : Tho' they were not then visible, yet the Event might fully shew them, and justify the Dealings of God with his Servant. Thus the pious Sufferer seems to have reason'd within himself, and to have supported his Spirits by such Reflections, against sinking under his Sorrows, and flying to Death, as to a Refuge and Sanctuary, from the Burden of a calamitous Life.

A very different Method from that which too many among us are apt to take under Afflictions, in no wise to be compar'd to those of JOB, either for Weight or Number : The Practice of *Self-Murder*



Murder is very prevailing among us, as we see by the too frequent Instances of it: For which Reason, and because some late Attempts have been made, not meerly to palliate and excuse this unnatural Action, but even to prove the Lawfulness and Reasonableness of it; it may be proper to offer some Reflections on this Subject, that you may be the better enabled to confirm yourselves, and (as Opportunity offers) convince the Unfortunate and Distress'd of your Acquaintance, how grievous the Sin is, and consequently, how dangerous to their Salvation: and for this Purpose, I shall confine myself chiefly to the Argument advanced in the Text, that it is our Duty to *receive Evil as well as Good, at the hand of God.*

The Opinions of particular Men, or indeed of whole Nations, are (I confess) no certain and infallible Arguments of the Lawfulness, or Unlawfulness of any Practice; but yet it must be allow'd, that they are of some Weight, when they are brought not to *prove*, but to support and strengthen Proofs drawn from Reason. And therefore, before I proceed to enlarge on the Argument offer'd in the Text, it may be of Importance to observe, that (generally speaking) all Kingdoms and States, Ancient as well as Modern, have agreed in forbidding and condemning Self-Murder: and on the same Side stand the Opinions of almost all the wisest and best Men of Hea-

then Antiquity. PYTHAGORAS† (one of the first Greek Philosophers) expressed his Sense of Self-Murder by a just and proper Allusion, which many of the best Writers since have adopted, and which is hardly ever left unmentioned on this Subject; for he compared our Situation in Life, to that of a Centinel upon Duty, and from thence observed, that *it is unlawful to quit our Post without the express leave of GOD our Commander.* It is well known too, that SOCRATES and PLATO* (those two Honours of Heathen Philosophy) declared themselves in express and strong Terms against this Action; and that ARISTOTLE (whose just Sense of Things all Ages have admired) has gone much farther than they, and charged the Self-Murderer with Cowardice in that

† PYTHAGORAS vetat injussu imperatoris, id esse Dei, de præsidio & statione vitæ decedere.

CICERO in Cat. Maj.

* PLAT. in Phæd. p. 62. Ed. Serrani. Ἐμὲ δὲ δοκεῖ ἡμᾶς τὰς ἀνθρώπους ἐν τῶν κλημάτων τοῖς Θεοῖς εἶναι. Οὐκ ἔστιν, &c. *Man seems to be one of those things, in which the Gods have reserved to themselves a Property. And therefore, as a Master would be angry with his Slave, if he should kill himself without his Leave, and would punish him (if he could) for so doing; so it is reasonable to think, that no Man ought to kill himself, unless GOD lays him under a Necessity of killing himself, as he now does me.* These are SOCRATES'S Words, just before he drank the Poison, by which he was publicly condemned to die at Athens.

that Act: *He * does not (says he) embrace Death, because it is honourable to him; but he flies from Life, because it is a Burden to him, and he has not the Courage to stand it.*

But the greatest Weight is laid by the Advocates for Self-Murder upon the Practice of the *Romans*: It has been called a *Roman Virtue*, and CATO is placed at the Head of this false Heroism: and yet it may be truly affirmed, that this Crime was scarcely ever more prevailing at *Rome*, than it is at present among us; that it was a Fashion, which (as with us) grew out of the Degeneracy and Corruption of the Times; and that the Laws of that Country † condemned and punished it, as ours do: Their best Writer and Philosopher,

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CICERO,

* ARIST. Ethic. ad Nicom. l. 3. c. 7. Τὸ δὲ ἀποθνήσκειν φεύγοντα πέναν, ἢ ἔρωλα, ἢ τὸ λυπηρὸν, οὐκ ἀνδρεῖς, ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον δεινῷ μαλακία γὰρ τὸ φεύγειν ἐπίπονα· καὶ οὐχ, ὅτι καλὸν, ὑπομένει, ἀλλὰ φεύγων κακόν.

† TARQUIN (the Roman King) ordered that the Self-Murderers should be crucified after their Deaths; and the Pontifical Books of the Romans provided, that they should be deprived of the Rites of Burial. See SERVIUS's Note on VIRGIL'S *Æn.* XII. 603. To which may be added what CICERO says in *Tusc. Disput.* 1. 30. Nec tamen vincula carceris ruperit; leges enim vetant,

CICERO, || pronounces it absolutely unlawful; and it is very remarkable, that their best Poet, VIRGIL,* has assigned to the Self-Murderer a Place of Torment and Misery, in his Description of the infernal Regions.

I have mentioned these Things, tho' very briefly, that we may see how the Wisdom of former Ages *condemns* instead of *favouring* (as some suppose) this sad Practice; and that we may not, through a just Admiration of the Virtues of the ancient Romans, be so far dazled, as to copy from those Parts of their Behaviour, which they themselves commonly esteemed Vices. What some few did, should not influence us so much, as what
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|| Cic. *Sonn. Scip.* Nisi Deus istis te corporis custodiis liberaverit, huc tibi aditus patere non potest: homines enim sunt hâc lege generati—& piis omnibus retinendus est animus in custodiâ corporis: nec injussu ejus, à quo ille est nobis datus, ex hominum vitâ migrandum est; ne munus humanum assignatum à Deo defugisse videamini. *TUSCUL. Disput.* 1. 30. Vetat dominans ille in nobis Deus injussu hinc nos suo demigrare.

- * Proxima deindetenent mœsti loca, qui sibi letum
Infantes peperere manu, lucemq; perosi
Projecere animam: Quàm vellent æthere in alto
Nunc & pauperiem, & duros perferre labores!
VIRG. *Æn.* l. 6.

the Generality thought; especially when it is considered, that those who made the Laws, or wrote against Self-Murder, are more likely to have proceeded by pure and unbiaſſed Reason, in their Judgment upon the Caſe, than thoſe did, who were driven by the Evils of Life, againſt the Bent and Paſſion of Nature, to become their own Executioners.

But let us come to the Argument offered in the Text, *viz.* that it is our Duty as well to *receive Evil, as Good at the hand of GOD*: The Argument (as you may perceive) is taken from our being abſolutely under the Dominion and Diſpoſal of GOD, as our Creator, Preſerver, and Governor: and to ſhew the Force of it, as directed againſt Self-Murder, the following Propoſitions may deſerve to be conſidered, as depending on each other, and amounting (I think) to a full Proof of the Point in queſtion.

(1.) If GOD gave us Life, it is certain that he gave it us for ſome End and Purpoſe; for to ſuppoſe that a Being, infinitely Wiſe and Good, has in any Inſtance acted without an End and Purpoſe, is to ſuppoſe a viſible Abſurdity: Now the Ends, which GOD had in view, when he gave us Life, could have been no other than one or both of theſe two, the promoting of his own

Glory and Service, or of our true and real Happiness.

(2.) While therefore these Ends last and subsist, no Man can justly presume upon God's Leave to depart out of Life, by his own Hands, because no Man, tho' in the most afflicted Condition, is incapable of answering one or both these Ends of Life.

For (to speak with regard to the first) if God's Glory and Service be promoted by the Practice of every Virtue; and if Patience and Submission to the Divine Will be Virtues; and if they are chiefly exercised in a State of Adversity; and if the greater the Adversity is, the more conspicuous these Virtues appear; does it not follow very plainly from hence, That the most afflicted Man is capable of advancing the Honour and Interests of his Maker?

Or if we consider the other End, for which Life may be supposed to have been given us, I mean the promoting of our own true and real Happiness; let us at the same time but allow, that we have a Being which is to exist in some future State of Recompence; and then natural Reason will tell us, that since Patience and Submission to the Will of God under Calamities are
Virtues,

Virtues, and since God is Just and Good, (as he must necessarily be), he cannot fail to reward these Virtues, either in the present World, (as he did in Job's Case) or in the next World, which is to be considered even now as part of our Portion and Inheritance. So that from this Reflection we may conclude, that even in the most miserable Condition of Man, this End of Life subsists : by the Practice of these Virtues, which are displayed only in a State of Affliction, he can pursue his truest, *i. e.* his most lasting Happiness ; he can make his patient Endurance of Evils here, the Means of his being eternally rewarded hereafter. And upon the Face of this whole Argument it will appear, that no Man, whatsoever his Condition be, can have a Right to throw away that Life which God has given him, because he can never be incapable of answering both those Ends, for which the Gift was bestowed.

(3.) Again, tho' God should not have given us Life, for any such Ends and Purposes as these ; or tho' in some Cases, we may be supposed wholly incapable of serving any Ends which God seems to have had in view ; yet it must be always remembered, that God has an absolute Property in our Lives : and therefore, without an express Declaration of his Will, we ought never to presume upon having his Consent to depart out of
A 6 Life,

Life, by our own Hands, and at our own Pleasure.

Those, who knew most of the Human Fabric, and have made the nicest Searches into it, have discovered great Reason to conclude, that we do not subsist in Life by any known Powers of Mechanism; by any fixed and settled Laws of Nature; but rather, that every Moment's Continuance of our Lives depends upon an immediate Act of God's Power, upon an Exertion of an actual Providence, without which the bodily Frame of Man would soon fall to pieces, and the operating Powers would be at a stand and destitute of all Motion. Now, if this be the case, (as it seems plainly enough to be) then it may be asked, Whether there can be at any time a stronger and fuller Declaration of God's Will that we should go on to live, than that he goes on to furnish us with Life? Must not a Man, in this view of the Matter, be thought a perverse Reasoner, who, while he finds God actually continuing Life to him, can presume upon his Permission to put an End to it by Violence? Are not the Parts, which God and he take at such a time, directly contrary? And does not the Self-Murderer act in plain opposition to the Will of God, which he feels (as it were) within him?

But

But if we consider Life in the more common, but less accurate way of considering it, I mean, as given to us at first, and once for all by the divine Author of it; yet still we may see great Reason to look upon Self-Murder as an unjust Use of the Gift: for it can never be supposed by any reasonable Man, that when God gave him the *Use* of Life, he intended to give away his own Right of *Dominion* and *Property* in it: Does it not follow then from hence, that a Right in us to *use* our Lives cannot include a Right to *destroy* them; because that puts an End to God's Right of *Dominion* and *Property* over them? We know, that when any Thing ceases to be, all Interest and *Property* in it ceases; whence then comes any Man's Right to do an Act thus injurious to his Creator? One thing we are sure of, and there is nothing more clear from the Principles of Morality, than it is, *viz.* that the strongest Right of *Use* cannot be lawfully exercised, when it injures another Person in his superior Right of *Dominion* and *Property*.

It has been said indeed, by the Advocates of Self-Murder, that unless Men are possessed of such a full and compleat Right over their Lives, no Magistrate in a Society could have the Power of Life and Death over the Subjects; because (as they say) this Power of the Magistrate arises
from

from Men's having transferred to Him the Right which they have over their own Lives. But however plausible this Argument may appear, it is in Truth founded wholly upon a mistaken Principle; for the Magistrate's Right over the Lives of Subjects arises from a very different Cause: It owes its being not to any Right which Men naturally have over their own Lives, and which they have agreed to convey to Him: but (if it was not given to Him by God) it arises rather from a Conveyance of that Right, which every Man has over the Life of him, who, in a State of Nature, would have forfeited it to him by his injurious Behaviour. This is the true Source of that Power of Life and Death, which the Magistrate is justly possessed of; and when once a Society is formed, this Right enlarges itself, and extends as far as the Ends of good Government necessarily require.

Life therefore being the Property of God, and Man having only a Right of Use in it, we may conclude from hence, that in this View it is absolutely unlawful for any Man, though under Calamities, to make such a *Use* of Life, as to destroy and put an End to God's Right of *Property* in it.

Thus far I have proceeded in my Reasonings upon the Argument which the Text offers; but there

there is another Reflection, which is suggested upon this Subject by the Story of the Speaker in the Text: For,

(4.) If all the abovementined Propositions were not clearly true; nay, if they were evidently false, yet the Generality of Self-Murderers act as irrational a Part as can well be imagined:

For, if those Calamities (which are the usual Temptations to this Crime, such as Pain, Poverty, Infamy, Disappointments, and the like) be only apprehended as coming upon us, is it not Wisdom to consider, that possibly they may never approach nearer; or they may be less severe, when they reach us, than they seem to be at a Distance; or We ourselves may have more Patience and Courage to bear them, than we expected? Of every one of these Particulars there are frequent Instances; and Experience shews us, that things are often found to be very different from what they appear to be: No Man knows the Strength of his Mind, any more than the Strength of his Body, till he has tried it; and the Supports furnished by Religion, Reason, and Example of others, are able to bear all the dead Weight of the worst Distresses and Calamities.

But if we suppose that these Evils are not *apprehended* only, but actually *come* home to us,
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But if we suppose that these Evils are not *apprehended* only, but actually *come* home to us,
and

and *felt* upon our Shoulders, yet why should we think that they are likely to be more settled and lasting than the contrary Blessings are, of Health, Riches, and Reputation? Is there any Condition of Life which is not subject to Accidents? Are not the *Evils* of it under the same State of Variableness as the *Good* Things of it? A Change therefore may come, and then it will be a delightful one, like the safe Landing after a violent Storm; the more welcome for what has passed. Thus, we know, it fared with JOB, whose History leaves him a much happier Man than it found him.

However, if no Change of our Calamities should happen, yet what is there almost that Experience and Habit does not make more easy, by making it more familiar to us? The most afflicted Man, by the Benefit of Time, can look round about him, and consider what Comforts he has to put in the Balance against his Evils: He has room to reflect, that there is no one Calamity which sets any Man at Enmity with his Life, but what some other Man has made a shift to endure, if not to be tolerably easy under, by giving his Thoughts some Diversion, and thus wearing off (as it were) the Edge of his Afflictions. And to this perhaps it is owing that, among the Writers in defence of *Self-Murder*, scarcely One
ever

ever put his fatal Doctrine in practice: They were wiser than their Rules, and seem to have shrewdly suspected that their Swords were surer than their Reasons: Their Behaviour therefore should convince us more than their Arguments; Nature within them spake the Truth, while their Pens were employed in asserting a Falshood.

Now from what has been said, we may see that the *Self Murderer* generally acts against all the Rules of Reason and Sense, as well as against those of Duty and Obligation: For while there is a Prospect of *untying* the Knot of his Calamities, he rashly chooses to *cut* it: While there is a Possibility that the present Evil may pass away, he flies to another Evil, that has no possible Remedy. He betakes himself to a desperate Refuge, such as that Seaman's is, who, when his Ship is on Fire, leaps into the main Ocean: It is the least calamitous Thing which his confused Thoughts then present to him: He goes to it as to no other than a new sort of Misery; which because he has not tried, he hopes may be more tolerable, tho' he knows that it is irreparable. So that upon the Principles of common Prudence a Man ought not, while there is any Shadow of Hope left, (and it is hardly ever seen that there is none left) to make an absolute Disposal of himself, by violently breaking the Thread of Life.

But

But above all things it ought to be well and seriously considered, that in this Action (if it takes effect immediately, as it commonly does, and always is design'd to do) there is no room for second Thoughts and for After-wisdom; and therefore if it be a Sin, it entirely excludes all place of Repentance. So that before any Man ventures upon such a desperate Crime as This, he should not only be without any one single Suspicion of its Unlawfulness, but he ought to be demonstrably assured of its Lawfulness. If there be any good Proof, or but the Appearance of one; nay, if there be but any Ground of Doubt, or even a bare Possibility of its being a Crime, he risks too much when he runs any Hazard of his eternal Welfare in the blind Enterprize. So that for a Man to talk of flying to Death, as to a *Port* and *Harbour* of Safety from the Evils which he meets with, is one of the most unaccountable Follies in Nature: For such an one leaps out of a Lesser into a Greater Evil, out of a Natural into a Moral one; with this Aggravation of his ill Choice, that the first may have a Remedy, whereas the latter cannot possibly have any.

These, and the like Reflections, may be of use to arm all of us, and to enable us to arm others, against the Arguments of such as set up
for

for Advocates of Self-Murder: and endeavour to deceive Men to their Ruin, by the Plausibleness of their Reasonings, and the seeming Greatness of their Sentiments; as when they tell us that, under all the Evils of Life, * *Death is the Remedy which Nature has kindly put into our Hands*; that we have † *the Keys of our Prison in our own Hands*, and that ‡ *on the Point of a Sword, or at the Bottom of a River, there is always Liberty to be found*. But how much nobler was that Sentiment of the same Heathen, who speaking of a Good Man combating with Misfortunes, and a Match for them, says, that § *it is a Sight which GOD himself might look down upon with Pleasure*? And we find in the Beginning of the Chapter from whence the Text is taken, that GOD is represented there as triumphing (as it were) in the Constancy of JOB, and making his Patience under Afflictions a Part of his own Honour; for thus he says to Satan, *Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the Earth, a perfect and an upright Man?*

There

* Philosoph. Dissertation upon Death, p. 94.

† Preface to Dr DONNE's Biathanatos.

‡ Seneca de Irâ, L. 3. §. 15.

§ Sen. de Providentiâ, §. 2.

There are no Virtues perhaps more perfect than such as are display'd in the patient enduring of Calamities: As Gold and Silver are purified by the Refiner's Fire, so are These by the Furnace of Affliction. And perhaps the truest kind of Courage is that which is exerted in bearing Misfortunes: Its Principle is more *within* the Man, than in any other Case; and therefore he that can face Misery is a Hero indeed. But however that be, there is nothing more rational in us as Men, than to take our Share in all the Dispositions of Providence, and to *dare* to undergo whatever Condition of Life is assigned us. But to a Christian, the Duty of Patience under Afflictions is much stronger: To take up our Cross of Evils, when we are called to it, is what we are taught not only by the Doctrine, but by the Example of our blessed Saviour. He came into a World, where he was a *Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with Grief*, and where he constantly *endured the Contradiction of Sinners*. A great part of his History is made up of his Sufferings, and his Life is one great Pattern of Submission to the Will of God, under the whole Weight of Misery. He has taught us by himself and his Apostles, that nothing is a real Evil but *Sin*; that the *Afflictions of this World are light, and but for a Moment*; that *God's Grace is sufficient for us*; and that *he will not suffer us to be tempted above what we*

we are able, if we use our best Endeavours, and pray aright for his heavenly Assistance.

And all of us have great Occasion seriously and frequently to consider the heinous Nature of Self-Murder, while we are yet unmolested and untempted by the Evils of Life; for the only Way to make the Rules about it of force to us, when we are miserable, is to imprint them deep in our Memories, while we are happy. And the peculiar Importance of right Notions in this part of our Duty, for which (if we transgress it) there is no Remedy, should make us desirous and earnest to rivet them in us; that if ever the Evil Day should overtake us, we may bring ourselves to sit down with JOB, and say, *What, shall we receive Good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive Evil?* And if ever Affliction should be the Portion of any of You, may God give you the Patience of JOB under it, and reward your Patience, as he did his; of whom it is said, that GOD *blest his latter End, more than his Beginning.*

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